

Golden Age

The term **Golden Age** comes from Greek mythology, particularly the *Works and Days* of Hesiod, and is part of the description of temporal decline of the state of peoples through five Ages, Gold being the first and the one during which the Golden Race of humanity (Greek: χρυσέον γένος *chrýseon génos*)^[1] lived. Those living in the first Age were ruled by **Kronos**, after the finish of the first age was the **Silver**, then the **Bronze**, after this the **Heroic** age, with the fifth and current age being **Iron**.^[2]

By extension "Golden Age" denotes a period of primordial **peace**, **harmony**, **stability**, and **prosperity**. During this age peace and harmony prevailed, people did not have to work to feed themselves, for the earth provided food in abundance. They lived to a very old age with a youthful appearance, eventually dying peacefully, with spirits living on as "guardians". *Plato* in *Cratylus* (397 e) recounts the golden race of humans who came first. He clarifies that Hesiod did not mean literally made of gold, but good and noble.

In classical Greek mythology the Golden Age was presided over by the leading Titan **Cronus**.^[3] In some version of the myth **Astraea** also ruled. She lived with men until the end of the Silver Age, but in the Bronze Age, when men became violent and greedy, fled to the stars, where she appears as the constellation **Virgo**, holding the scales of Justice, or **Libra**.^[4]

European **pastoral** literary tradition often depicted nymphs and shepherds as living a life of rustic innocence and peace, set in **Arcadia**, a region of Greece that was the abode and center of worship of their tutelary deity, goat-footed **Pan**, who dwelt among them.^[5]



The Golden Age by Pietro da Cortona (Palazzo Pitti, Florence, Italy).

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The Golden Age in Europe: Greece

The earliest attested reference to the European myth of the **Ages of Man** 500 BCE–350 BCE appears in the late 6th century BCE works of the Greek poet Hesiod's *Works and Days* (109–126). Hesiod, a deteriorationist, identifies the Golden Age, the **Silver Age**, the Bronze Age, the **Heroic Age**, and the **Iron Age**. With the exception of the Heroic Age, each succeeding age was worse than the one that went before. Hesiod maintains that during the Golden Age, before the invention of the arts, the earth produced food in such abundance that there was no need for agriculture:

[Men] lived like gods without sorrow of heart, remote and free from toil and grief: miserable age rested not on them; but with legs and arms never failing they made merry with feasting beyond the reach of all evils. When they died, it was as though they were overcome with sleep, and they had all good things; for the fruitful earth unforced bare them fruit abundantly and without stint. They dwelt in ease and peace.

Plato in his *Cratylus* referred to an age of golden men and also expounded at some length on Ages of Man from Hesiod's *Works and Days*. The Roman poet *Ovid* simplified the concept by reducing the number of Ages to four: Gold, Bronze, Silver, and Iron. Ovid's poetry, known to schoolboys from Antiquity through the Middle Ages and beyond, was likely a prime source for the transmission of the myth of the Golden Age during the period when Western Europe had lost direct contact with Greek literature.

In Hesiod's version, the Golden Age ended when the Titan *Prometheus* conferred on mankind the gift of fire and all the other arts. For this, Zeus punished Prometheus by chaining him to a rock in the Caucasus, where an eagle eternally ate at his liver. The gods sent the beautiful maiden Pandora to Prometheus's brother Epimetheus. The gods had entrusted Pandora with a **box** that she was forbidden to open; however, her uncontrollable curiosity got the better of her and she opened the box, thereby unleashing all manner of evil into the world.

The **Orphic school**, a **mystery** cult that originated in **Thrace** and spread to Greece in the 5th century BCE, held similar beliefs about the early days of man, likewise denominating the ages with metals. In common with the many other mystery cults prevalent in the Graeco-Roman world (and their Indo-European religious antecedents),

the world view of Orphism was cyclical. Initiation into its secret rites, together with ascetic practices, was supposed to guarantee the individual's soul eventual release from the grievous circle of mortality and also communion with god(s). Orphics sometimes identified the Golden Age with the era of the god Phanes, who was regent over the Olympus before Cronus. In classical mythology however, the Golden Age was associated with the reign of Saturn. In the 5th century BCE, the philosopher Empedocles, like Hesiod before him, emphasized the idea of primordial innocence and harmony in all of nature, including human society, from which he maintained there had been a steady deterioration until the present.

Arcadia

A tradition arose in Greece that the site of the original Golden Age had been Arcadia, an impoverished rural area of Greece where the herdsmen still lived on acorns and where the goat-footed god Pan had his home among the poplars on Mount Maenalus. However, in the 3rd century BCE, the Greek poet, Theocritus, writing in Alexandria, set his pastoral poetry in on the lushly fertile island of Sicily, where he had been born. The protagonist of Theocritus's first Idyll, the goat herder, Daphnis, is taught to play the Syrinx (panpipes) by Pan himself.

The Golden Age in Rome: Virgil and Ovid

Writing in Latin during the turbulent period of revolutionary change at the end of the Roman Republic (roughly between 44 and 38 BCE), the poet Virgil moved the setting for his pastoral imitations of Theocritus back to an idealized Arcadia in Greece, thus initiating a rich and resonant tradition in subsequent European literature.

Virgil, moreover, introduced into his poetry the element of political allegory, which had been largely absent in Theocritus, even intimating in his fourth Eclogue that a new Golden Age of peace and justice was about to return:

*Ultima Cumaei venit iam carminis aetas;
magnus ab integro saeculorum nascitur ordo:
iam redit et Virgo, redeunt Saturnia regna;
iam nova progenies caelo demittitur alto.*

Translation:

*Now the last age by Cumae's Sibyl sung
Has come and gone, and the majestic roll
Of circling centuries begins anew:
Astraea returns,
Returns old Saturn's reign,
With a new breed of men sent down from heaven.^[6]*

Somewhat later, shortly before he wrote his epic poem the Aeneid, which dealt with the establishment of Roman Imperial rule, Virgil composed his Georgics (29 BCE), modeled directly on Hesiod's *Works and Days* and similar Greek works. Ostensibly about agriculture, the *Georgics* are in fact a complex allegory about how man's alterations of nature (through works) are related to good and bad government. Although Virgil does not mention the Golden Age by name in the *Georgics*, he does refer in them to a time of primitive communism before the reign of Jupiter, when:

*Fields knew no taming hand of husbandmen
To mark the plain or mete with boundary-line.
Even this was impious; for the common stock
They gathered, and the earth of her own will
All things more freely, no man bidding, bore.*

*ante Iouem nulli subigebant arua coloni
ne signare quidem aut partiri limite campum
fas erat; in medium quaerebant, ipsaque tellus
omnia liberius nullo poscente ferebat.* (*Georgics*, Book 1: 125–28 (<http://www.theoi.com/Text/VirgilGeorgics1.html#1>))

This view, which identifies a State of Nature with the celestial harmony of which man's nature is (or should be, if properly regulated) a microcosm, reflects the Hellenistic cosmology that prevailed among literate classes of Virgil's era. It is seen again in Ovid's *Metamorphoses* (7 CE), in which the lost Golden Age is depicted as a place and time when, because nature and reason were harmoniously aligned, men were naturally good:

*The Golden Age was first; when Man, yet new,
No rule but uncorrupted Reason knew:
And, with a native bent, did good pursue.
Unforc'd by punishment, un-aw'd by fear.
His words were simple, and his soul sincere;
Needless was written law, where none oppress:
The law of Man was written in his breast.^[7]*

The Graeco-Roman concept of the "natural man" delineated by Ovid and many other classical writers, was especially popular during the Deistically inclined 18th century. It



The Golden Age by Lucas Cranach the Elder.



Sculpture of Pan teaching Daphnis to play the pipes; c. 100 BCE Found in Pompeii.

is often erroneously attributed to [Rousseau](#), who did not share it.^[8]

"Soft" and "hard" primitivism in Arcadia

In his famous essay, "[Et in Arcadia ego: Poussin and the Elegiac Tradition](#)",^[9] [Erwin Panofsky](#) remarks how in ancient times, "that particular not overly opulent, region of central Greece, Arcady, came to be universally accepted as an ideal realm of perfect bliss and beauty, a dream incarnate of ineffable happiness, surrounded nevertheless with a halo of 'sweetly sad' melancholy":

There had been, from the beginning of classical speculation, two contrasting opinions about the natural state of man, each of them, of course, a "Gegen-Konstruktion" to the conditions under which it was formed. One view, termed "soft" primitivism in an illuminating book by Lovejoy and Boas^[10] conceives of primitive life as a golden age of plenty, innocence, and happiness—in other words, as civilized life purged of its vices. The other, "hard" form of primitivism conceives of primitive life as an almost subhuman existence full of terrible hardships and devoid of all comforts—in other words, as civilized life stripped of its virtues.

Arcady, as we encounter it in all modern literature, and as we refer to it in our daily speech, falls under the heading of "soft" or golden-age primitivism. To be sure, this real Arcady was the domain of Pan, who could be heard playing the [syrinx](#) on Mount [Maenalus](#); and its inhabitants were famous for their musical accomplishments as well as for their ancient lineage, rugged virtue, and rustic hospitality.

Other Golden Ages

There are analogous concepts in the religious and philosophical traditions of the South Asian subcontinent. For example, the [Vedic](#) or ancient [Hindu](#) culture saw history as cyclical, composed of [yugas](#) with alternating Dark and Golden Ages. The Kali yuga (Iron Age), Dwapara yuga (Bronze Age), Treta yuga (Silver Age) and Satya yuga (Golden Age) correspond to the four Greek ages. Similar beliefs occur in the ancient [Middle East](#) and throughout the ancient world, as well.^[11]

Hindu

The Indian teachings differentiate the four world ages ([Yugas](#)) not according to metals, but according to quality with Truth being the defining feature of the Golden Age. After the world fall at the end of the fourth, worst age (the Kali yuga) named after the Messianic figure Kali, the cycle should be continued, eventually culminating in a new golden age.

The [Krita Yuga](#) also known as the Satya yuga, the First and Perfect Age, as described in the [Mahabharata](#), a [Hindu](#) epic:

Men neither bought nor sold; there were no poor and no rich; there was no need to labour, because all that men required was obtained by the power of will; the chief virtue was the abandonment of all worldly desires. The *Krita Yuga* was without disease; there was no lessening with the years; there was no hatred or vanity, or evil thought whatsoever; no sorrow, no fear. All mankind could attain to supreme blessedness.

Satya Yuga lasts for 1,728,000 years, Treta Yuga 1,296,000 years, Dvapara Yuga 864,000 years and Kali Yuga 432,000 years. According to the Puranas there are 71 such cycles in a life of Manu whose life duration is 306.72 million years. The reign of fourteen Manus (4.32 billion years) comprises one day (Kalpa) of Brahma.^[12] Knowledge, meditation, and communion with Spirit hold special importance in this era. The average life expectancy of a human being in Satya Yuga is believed to be about 100,000 years. That duration of life declines in next age, Treta Yuga to 10,000 years, followed by Dvapara Yuga 1 000 years and Kali Yuga up to 100 years. During Satya Yuga, most people engage only in good, sublime deeds and mankind lives in harmony with the earth. [Ashrams](#) become devoid of wickedness and deceit. [Natyam](#) (such as [Bharatanatyam](#)), according to [Natyashastra](#), did not exist in the Satya Yuga "because it was the time when all people were happy".

Brahma Kumaris

The [Brahma Kumaris](#) and [Prajapita Brahma Kumaris](#) make reference to five yuga in a single cycle of 5,000 years in which the Golden Age, or Satya yuga, is the first and lasts for 1,250 years. Three of the remaining four; Thretha Yuga (Silver Age), Dwarpar Yuga (Copper Age) and Kali Yuga (Iron Age), also last for 1,250 years each. The fifth age, Sangum Yuga (Confluence Age), is given to the last 100 years of the fourth age and represents the period when the Iron Age is destroyed and the next Golden Age is created.^[13] The World Drama is the story of the rise and fall of human souls during their sojourn in this world. It is about the interplay of souls, matter and God, and of the different stages through which human souls pass in five different epochs or acts of this drama. The drama begins with the Golden Age, when every soul expresses its original qualities of purity, peace, love and truth, and human relationships are marked by complete harmony. The virtuous nature of these divine beings is mirrored by nature, which is in its pristine state and serves humans with abundance. This is the time remembered as heaven or paradise by humanity.

Golden age is the time when the human beings are full of all the divine virtues and have all the seven qualities peace, purity, love, wisdom, happiness, power and bliss to the fullest. And henceforth they are called deities, that we remember them as were our ancestors and whose divinity is worshiped in Hindu temples. The silver age comes after golden age where as time goes by, the souls, who are the actors in this drama, undergo a gradual decline. By Act Two, the number of souls has increased significantly, and though all are still happy and prosperous, the radiance and fullness that characterized their lives is no more.^[14]

Rajayoga Mediation taught at the Brahma Kumaris are the way to revive the seven qualities within and awaken self true divinity, the souls of Satyuga AKA Golden Age has.

Meditation energizes your awareness, bringing both peace and wisdom to a busy mind. It expands one's capacity to love, and heals broken hearts. It also dissolves many fears, replacing them with lightness and freedom from anxiety.

But perhaps the greatest gift that meditation brings is the glow of inner peace that is both gentle and strong.

Practice of Rajyoga meditation or intellectual communion with God brings into the soul many powers. Of these, eight are important. The Eight Powers. (<http://www.brahmakumaris.com/rajoyoga-meditation/benefits-of-meditation/>)^[14]

The Old Norse word *gullaldr* (literally "Golden Age") was used in Völuspá to describe the period after Ragnarök, where the surviving gods and their progeny build the city Gimlé on the ruins of Asgard. In this period, Baldr reigns.

There is a reference to a succession of kingdoms in Nebuchadnezzar's dream in Daniel 2, in decreasing order identified as gold, silver, bronze, iron and finally mixed iron and clay.

— Daniel 2: 31-35

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1. Hesiod, "109", *Works and Days*.
2. Robin Hard - The Routledge Handbook of Greek Mythology: Based on H.J. Rose's "Handbook of Greek Mythology" (<https://books.google.com/books?id=r1Y3xZWVlnIC&pg>), p.69-70 (<https://books.google.com/books?id=r1Y3xZWVlnIC&pg=PA70&dq=The+Golden+age+in+Greek+mythology&hl=en&sa=X&ved=0ahUKEwj3gPh9tvTAhVLbBoKHWhQDkwQ6AEIJTAB#v=onepage&q=The%20Golden%20age%20in%20Greek%20mythology&f=false>), Psychology Press, 2004 ISBN 0415186366, Accessed 2017-06-May
3. Gravity, Grass (1960). *The Greek Myths*. London: Penguin Books. pp. 35–37. ISBN 9780140171990.
4. "Hesiod calls [Astraea] the daughter of Jove and Themis. Aratus says that she is thought to be the daughter of Astraeus and Aurora, who lived at the time of the Golden Age of men and was their leader. On account of her carefulness and fairness she was called Justice, and at that time no foreign nations were attacked in war, nor did anyone sail over the seas, but they were wont to live their lives caring for their fields. But those born after their death began to be less observant of duty and more greedy, so that Justice associated more rarely with men. Finally the disease became so extreme that it was said the Brazen Race was born; then she could not endure more, and flew away to the stars." (Gaius Julius Hyginus, *Astronomica* 2 (<http://www.theoi.com/Text/HyginusAstronomica2.html#25>)).
5. Bridget Ann Henish, *The Medieval Calendar Year* (ISBN 0-271-01904-2), p. 96.
6. Eclogue (lines 5-8) (<http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/cgi-bin/ptext?doc=Perseus%3Atext%3A1999.02.0056&layout=&loc=4.1>)
7. Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, Book the First, eighteenth century version, "Translated into English verse under the direction of Sir Samuel Garth by (<http://www.poemhunter.com/poem/metamorphoses-book-the-first/>) John Dryden, Alexander Pope, Joseph Addison, William Congreve, and other eminent hands.
8. See A. O. Lovejoy's essay on "The Supposed Primitivism of Rousseau's Discourse on Inequality" in *Essays in the History of Ideas* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1948, 1960)
9. "Et in Arcadia ego: Poussin and the Elegiac Tradition," in *Meaning in the Visual Arts* (New York: Doubleday, 1955) pp. 297–98.
10. A. O. Lovejoy and G. Boas, *Primitivism and Related Ideas in Antiquity* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1935).
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12. Matsya Purana
13. "The ages of the time cycle according to the Brahma Kumaris" (<https://web.archive.org/web/20091215144916/http://www.brahmakumaris.com/rajayoga-meditation/cycle-of-time.html>). Archived from the original (<http://www.brahmakumaris.com/rajayoga-meditation/cycle-of-time.html>) on 15 December 2009.
14. "The World Drama - Brahma Kumaris® Int'l HQ | Godly University For Free RajYoga Meditation" (<http://www.brahmakumaris.com/rajyoga-meditation/the-world-drama/>). *Brahma Kumaris® Int'l HQ | Godly University For Free RajYoga Meditation*. Retrieved 2018-05-05.
15. "Daniel 2: 31-35" (<https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=daniel+2%3A+31-35&version=NIV>). Zondervon. Retrieved 15 December 2014.
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21. Ridley, Rosalind (2016). *Peter Pan and the Mind of J M Barrie*. Cambridge Scholars Publishing.

External links

- The Age of Man (<http://www.maicar.com/GML/AgesOfMan.html#golden>)
- Five Ages of Man in Greek Mythology (<http://ancienthistory.about.com/cs/grecoromanmyth1/a/hesiodagesofman.htm>)
- What Makes a Scientific Golden Age? (https://link.springer.com/chapter/10.1007/978-94-011-6456-6_28#page-2) - by Joseph Agassi

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